

Choosing a name is one of the first steps in developing a postsecondary education program for students with intellectual disability. A program's name is an integral part of attracting attention to its mission and highlighting its importance among students, families, university staff/faculty, and community members. In [*What's in a Name? Analysis and Reflections on Naming of Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability*](#), Papay et al. (2022) share guidance for naming postsecondary education programs. The researchers analyzed the names of 310 existing programs from Think College's directory for common words and themes. Based on the results of these analyses, the researchers offer reflections and suggestions for future practice.

Many existing program names use an acronym associated with skill attainment and/or student outcomes. Acronyms were the most common theme identified by the researchers, present in 40% of program names. Many other program names are centered around a school mascot to instill pride in the university and create a sense of belonging. While these may seem like good ideas during the initial stages of planning, the resulting name can hinder the full inclusion of program participants.

Papay et al. (2022) suggest the program's name holds substantial weight in shaping perceptions, potentially affecting students' experiences and their integration within the academic community.

Here are some potential pitfalls of common approaches to program naming:

- » **Using acronyms.** A name with an acronym may require significant explanation about what it stands for and why it was chosen. Acronym names also have the potential to portray the primary message of a specialized social or support program and not an academic program.
- » **Using terms focused on inclusion or disability.** Inclusion and disability-focused names can indicate the program participants' association with a disability, which takes away the students' choice in disclosing their disability. Choosing to disclose your disability is a key component of self-determination, a foundational premise for inclusive postsecondary education programming.
- » **Using a school mascot.** Naming a program around a school mascot can unintentionally evoke the idea that students are "stand-out" members of the community, which can be interpreted as "different" and not as an equally participating student on campus.

[Read the full article, *What's in a Name? Analysis and Reflections on Naming of Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability*.](#)

Recommendations for Program Naming

A better approach to program naming is to choose a name that emphasizes the academic focus. Often, the best way to do this is to use the name of the program's credential. This approach aligns with common and standard practices of higher education and emphasizes the program of study for the student. Some examples are College & Community Studies, Integrated Studies, or Interdisciplinary Studies. Instead of calling attention to a disability-focused program, this approach allows students to identify with their area of study much like their peers in other areas of study (e.g. Early Childhood Education, Marketing, or Welding). If the program does not offer a credential, the program's name should consider its focus, for example, Transition to Postsecondary Education or Career Studies.

Reference

Papay, C., Choiseul-Praslin, B., & Weir, C. (2022). What's in a name? Analysis and reflections on naming of postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education*, 3(2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2021.2>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MINDY LINGO is Training Developer for the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network, Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston.

CLARE PAPAY is Senior Research Associate and Co-Principal Investigator of the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network, Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston.



Visit: www.thinkcollege.net

Follow: [@thinkcollegeICI](https://twitter.com/thinkcollegeICI)

Contact: thinkcollegeTA@umb.edu

Subscribe: thinkcollege.net/subscribe

HOW TO THINK COLLEGE, ISSUE NO. 17

This is a publication of the Think College Inclusive Higher Education Network at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, and funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education (Grant # P407C210001). The opinions contained in this document are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders.

Recommended citation for this publication: Lingo, M. & Papay, C. (2024). The Importance of Naming Your Program. How To Think College, Issue No. 17. Boston, MA: Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.



ThinkCollege
INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON